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ERRORS & TERRORS



OF BLIND GUIDES



RICHARD N. E. WILKINS





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ERRORS AND TERRORS
OF
BLIND GUIDES.



ERRORS AND TERRORS OF BLIND GUIDES.



THE POPULAR DOCTRINE OF EVERLASTING PAIN,

REFUTED

BY THE

REV. N. G. WILKINS, M. A., LL. M. (Cambridge),
CHAPLAIN TO THE ENGLISH AND AMERICAN RESIDENTS IN HANOVER.

"A time to pluck up that which is planted."
ECCLESIASTES.

THIRD AND ENLARGED EDITION.



HANOVER.

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PREFACE.

In the following work, the design of which is to aid in banishing from the world one of the most ancient, most widely prevalent, and most gloomy of superstitions, it will be found that the infinitely important subject under consideration has been, if briefly, yet thoroughly discussed and dealt with. It has been regarded from various points of view. All the arguments which are usually advanced on the popular side of the question have been fairly stated and fully answered. Moreover, the conclusions arrived at, have been made to rest, not upon the supposed meaning of some few words in a dead language, nor upon the authority of a few, or of many great names, but upon such broad and solid foundations, as can be seen and felt by every observant and reflecting man.

I may add, that, owing to the fact of my being resident in Hanover, I have been unable to refer to many English books, and that I have consequently been obliged, in some instances, to be content with giving the substance of popular

arguments, where I should have preferred to give the exact words of particular authors.

5 Böhmer-Strasse, Hanover.

March 1875.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

Since the publication of the first edition of this work a very considerable and significant change of opinion, with regard to the doctrine in question, has been evinced.

In various religious communities — in the Church of England, in the Wesleyan body, among the Congregationalists, in the Free Church of Scotland, eminent men have come forward openly repudiating the popular dogma, and in some cases, attacking it with much force of reason and rhetoric.

My own experience leads me to believe that the better educated lay members of the Church of England have now generally ceased to hold the dogma; although many of them imagine that it is an essential part of the Christian revelation.

This edition contains an additional chapter — that on the Old Theory of Punishment and the New.

Hanover, 22. March 1880.

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I.

Object of this work. — Quotations illustrating the popular doctrine. — This doctrine, that of many English Churchmen, but not that of the English Church. — Ecclesiastical guides at variance among themselves, and hence cannot all be infallible. — First Christian Teachers attacked under similar circumstances the popular superstition of their time. — The “blind guides” of the first and fifteenth centuries.

I assert, and I undertake to prove to every person who possesses ordinary intelligence and a mind open to conviction, that the commonly taught doctrine, that certain persons will suffer bodily or mental torment for ever, is a doctrine not only opposed to the teaching of God’s word and of God’s works, but that it is in a high degree mischievous: and I undertake moreover to shew that such a doctrine is incapable of being proved by any revelation however well authenticated.

In order to make it clear that I am not fighting against a shadow, but that this doctrine is commonly taught, I give quotations from the works of authors representing various schools of theology.

“Little child, if you go to hell there will be a devil at your side to strike you. He will go on striking you every minute for ever and ever

without ever stopping. The first stroke will make your body as bad as the body of Job, covered from head to foot with sores and ulcers. The second stroke will make your body twice as bad as the body of Job. The third stroke will make your body three times as bad as the body of Job. The fourth stroke will make your body four times as bad as the body of Job. How then will your body be after the devil has been striking it every moment for a hundred million of years without stopping?"

"Perhaps at this moment, 7 o'clock in the evening, a child is just going into hell. To-morrow evening at 7 o'clock go and knock at the gates of hell and ask what the child is doing. The devils will go and look. They will come back again and say *the child is burning*. Go in a week and ask what the child is doing; you will get the same answer *it is burning*. Go in a year and ask, the same answer comes — *it is burning*. Go in a million of years and ask the same question; the answer is just the same — *it is burning*. So if you go for ever and ever, you will always get the same answer *it is burning in the fire*."

The Sight of Hell by Rev. J. Furniss, C.S.S.R.
Permissu Superiorum.

Published by Duffy, Sons & Co.

"Painting to his mind the all-importance of eternity, that is of happiness or *misery inconceivable and everlasting*, I would address him in the words of St. Augustin . . ."

The End of Religious Controversy

by Rev. John Milner, D. D., F. S. A.

Bishop of Castabala

and Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District of England.

"We are only once to die and in that, all is at stake; either *eternity of torments in hell*, or of happiness in heaven."

"O what a lamentable thing will it be for a sinner to see himself not only abandoned by men, but also by angels and even by God himself and delivered over into the power of the infernal dragon, without all hopes of escaping from him, who will seize upon thy soul and carry it to the abyss of hell there to be *tormented for ever*."

"The slavery of the damned in hell is such that all their senses and powers of soul and body are subject unto *eternal pains and torments*, with their touch they are to serve that burning and never-consuming fire; with their taste, hunger and thirst; with their smell, stink; with their sight, those horrid and monstrous shapes, which the devils shall assume; with their hearing, scorns and affronts; with their imagination, horror; with their memory, despair; with their understanding

confusion; with such a multitude of other punishments as they shall want eyes to weep for them."

"The *torments in hell* are so many in number that they cannot be numbered; so *long in continuance that they cannot be measured*; so *grievous in quality that they cannot be endured* but with such infinite pain that every minute of an hour shall seem a whole year."

Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell
by Bishop Jeremy Taylor.

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"I do fully and freely assent unto this as unto a most necessary and infallible truth, that the unjust after their resurrection and condemnation shall be tormented for their sins in hell and shall be so *continued in torments for ever*, so as neither the justice of God shall ever cease to inflict them, nor the persons of the wicked cease to subsist and suffer them."

*Exposition of the Creed*  
by Bishop Pearson.

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"Is it an intolerable thing to burn part of thy body by holding it in the fire? What then will it be to *suffer ten thousand times more for ever* in hell."

Saints' Everlasting Rest.
by Richard Baxter.

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"There is a dreadful hell  
 And *everlasting pains*  
 Where sinners must with devils dwell  
 In darkness fire and chains."

*Divine Songs for Children*  
 by Isaac Watts D. D.

"But with the sinner's fear their hope departs,  
 Fast link'd as thy great Name to Thee O Lord:  
 That Name, by which Thy faithful oath is past  
 That we should *endless* be for joy or *woe*."

"Salted with fire they seem to shew  
 How spirits lost in *endless woe*  
 May *undecaying live*.  
 Oh sickening thought! yet hold it fast  
 Long as this glittering world shall last  
 Or sin at heart survive."

*The Christian Year*,  
 by Rev. John Keble.

"Q. What shall be done to the wicked at the day of judgment?

A. At the day of judgment the bodies of the wicked being raised out of their graves shall be sentenced together with their souls to *unspeakable torments* with the devil and his angels *for ever*."

*Catechism Compiled by Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*  
*from the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*  
*and the Baptist Catechism.*

"What sort of a place is hell?

Hell is a dark and bottomless pit full of fire and brimstone.

How will the wicked be punished there?

The wicked will be punished in hell by having their bodies tormented by fire, and their souls by a sense of the wrath of God.

How long will these torments last?

The torments of hell will last for ever and ever."

*Catechism of the Wesleyan Methodists.*

Compiled and Published by Order of the Conference.

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 "Q. What are the punishments of sin in the world to come?

A. The punishments of sin in the world to come are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God and most grievous torments in soul and body without intermission in hell fire for ever."

The Larger Catechism Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster and Approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

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 "Whenever this final settlement does come, it must leave all living souls for ever fixed in the state in which it finds them, whether for endless sin and rebellion against God, or endless love of Him and enjoyment of His presence in holiness."

*Life, a Time of Trial*  
 by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

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“Our Lord’s express references to the worm that dieth not, to the fire that never shall be quenched, certainly oblige us to think, not of an enduring annihilation, but of a perpetuated state of penal misery.”

Sermon Preached in S. Paul’s Cathedral,
by Rev. Canon Liddon.

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“We are bribed in our own case to disbelieve in, or to shrink from owning the possibility of that terrible fixedness in misery and evil. So God has exhibited it to us in our dreadful enemy.... Apart from all those terrific physical miseries of which our Lord speaks, the inextinguishable fire the never-dying worm of each, the society of the damned were misery unutterable.... Gather in one in your mind an assembly of all those men or women from whom, whether in history or in fiction, your memory most shrinks, gather in mind all which is most loathsome, most revolting.... conceive the fierce fiery eyes of hate, spite, phrenzied rage ever fixed on thee, looking thee through and through with hate.... hear those yells of blaspheming concentrated hate as they echo along the lurid vault of hell; every one hating every one.... Yet a fixedness in that state in which the hardened malignant sinner

dies involves, without any further retribution of God, this endless misery."

*Sermon* by Rev. E. B. Pusey, D. D.  
Regius Professor of Hebrew, and Canon  
of Christ Church, Oxford.

"....Ay die eternally — not be extinguished, not be annihilated, but the sentence is "the lake that burns", "body and soul in hell", *the consummation of misery*, all that the wrath of God can itself inflict."

*Sermon, Preached in S. James's Hall,*  
by Rev. Capel Molyneux.

It is important to observe that the doctrine in question, although undoubtedly taught by some of the Bishops and by many of the inferior Clergy\* of the Church of England is not the declared doctrine of that Church; for it is neither taught in the Thirty Nine Articles nor is there any expression in the Book of Common Prayer which can be proved to teach such a

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\* As a proof of this statement, I may mention that, in the year 1869, at a rural-decanal meeting (held in the neighbourhood of Alton) on an occasion when the doctrine of future punishment was under discussion, I stood alone in disputing the truth of the popular doctrine — not one of the fifteen or twenty other clergymen present having a word to say against the traditionary view.

doctrine: on the contrary "death" not "everlasting torment" is therein\* held out as the end of the sinner who will not turn from his wickedness.

The popular doctrine is indeed distinctly taught in a Hymn Book recently put forth and very generally used in our Church. I refer to the compilation entitled "*Hymns Ancient and Modern*" — the expressions "eternity of woe" and "must burn eternally" occurring respectively in Hymns 375 and 88 of this Collection. This book however has no claim to be an exponent of Church of England doctrine.

When I make the assertion that the majority of ecclesiastical guides are, in a fundamental point of doctrine, in grievous error some may think that I take up a position of unparalleled presumption. It should however be observed, that we are all accustomed to assume, that the religious opinions held by very high authorities are, in many points erroneous. Roman Catholics, for example, assume that the doctrine of the learned prelates and subtle theological doctors of other Christian Churches is in many essential points

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\* See the form of Absolution in the Order for Morning and for Evening Prayer, the third Collect for Good Friday, the Collect for the 4th Sunday after Trinity "that we finally lose not the things eternal"; and the Collect for the 1st Sunday in Advent "we may rise to the life immortal."

erroneous; while again, Protestants assume that the doctrine of the learned prelates and subtle theological doctors of the Church of Rome is in many very important points erroneous.

They who are accustomed to make such assumptions should not rashly reject without examination, as groundless and extravagant, the assertion (for which there are offered abundant and various proofs) that on this one point, viz. on that of the future punishment of the wicked, the religious opinions of Roman Catholics and of most Protestants are alike erroneous.

It is no new thing for the holders of a great truth to be in the minority and for all the weight of authority and all the weight of tradition to be thrown in the scale of error. What great truth has ever been received without opposition? What gross error or superstition has ever been abandoned without a struggle on the part of its upholders to retain it?

If in the present day the Pope and the College of Cardinals, hundreds of learned Professors, and Christian Ministers Catholic and Protestant in tens of thousands, teach the doctrine of the everlasting torment of the wicked, there were in the Roman world, it should be remembered, when Christianity was first preached, the Pontifex Maximus and the College of Pontiffs, hundreds of learned philo-

sophers, and heathen Priests and Augurs in tens of thousands, who either taught, or at least professed to believe, the filthy nonsense of which the popular religion of *that* time contained so much.

It should be borne in mind, moreover, that men occupying positions of authority in the Church of God have held and taught opinions which were most grossly erroneous.

The "blind guides" among the Jews in the time of our Lord entirely misunderstood and misinterpreted those passages of their Scriptures which referred to that very important matter, the character and mission of the promised Messiah; and they actually excommunicated\* every person who presumed to think that the Messianic prophecies had reference to Jesus.

Nor will any Protestant need to be reminded, that during the century which preceded the preaching of Luther the doctrines universally taught by the authority of the Church contained a large admixture of mischievous error.

Thoughtful men with these facts before them should not allow themselves to be carried away by popular opinions, nor be surprised if it should prove that the people and their religious guides are, on the important point under consideration, again in error.

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\* See John ix. 22.

## II.

*Probable origin of the superstition. — Importance of the subject under consideration. — One's duty to examine the question and when convinced to make known one's conclusions, on account of the Mischievous Effects of the popular doctrine.*

Before considering the evidence against and for the truth of the doctrine in question, it will be well to enquire what can be offered in explanation of its general prevalence. One theory which has been put forward is, that this doctrine must, from the very fact of its general prevalence, have had its origin in some primeval revelation, which was communicated by the Creator to Adam or Noah and which was preserved and faithfully handed down to historical times. To this theory however there is an insuperable objection; for it is surely absurd to suppose that, while God made provision that this important doctrine should be imparted to almost all the rest of mankind, he would have kept his chosen people in ignorance of it.

The Jews were not taught this doctrine by their prophets — those among that people who, in different ages, have come to hold the doctrine, have either adopted it from the religious systems

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of their gentile neighbours, or they have accepted it as a deduction of reason. The Mishnah knows nothing of hell. In the Talmud there is only a temporary punishment even for the worst sinners. At the present time the leaders of thought amongst this people seem to have cast off the doctrine as a superstition.

The origin of the belief seems to have been simply this. — Men have a disposition to ascribe to the Supreme Being the same feelings and passions greatly intensified, which they possess themselves. And since, in the childhood of the world, men were generally cruel in their treatment of those who had offended them (cruelty being a vice specially belonging to the *childhood* of individuals and of nations) they concluded that God would deal out a punishment immeasurably severe to those who *offended Him*. When this notion had once gained ground, it is easy to see how priests and kings might think it politic to propagate and confirm such a belief.

That this doctrine should have been widely prevalent among Christians in a very early age of the Church is not much to be wondered at, when we consider how very generally this belief had obtained possession of the minds of the heathen, and when we consider further, how slow men are to give up any ancient and awe-

inspiring superstition in which they have been reared.

Few Protestants will deny that several doctrines and usages borrowed from heathendom crept into the Church in the first ages of its existence, and that they have remained in the Roman branch of the Church to the present day. It is only reasonable then to conclude that the doctrine in question is of like heathen origin.

The question before us is evidently one of the utmost interest and importance. Every one must be interested in ascertaining whether he and his fellow-men are or are not exposed to the danger of incurring this fearful eternity of torment. If, as the result of his enquiries, a man finds that his\* fears for himself and those dear to him are utterly groundless — that the

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\* The Christian revelation, it is true, gives certain people cause to fear a certain punishment in the next world; but, as it will be shewn, what it gives them cause to fear is, that they may have to forfeit (what but for their vices they might have enjoyed) an everlasting life of happiness — that their souls and bodies will be destroyed. This is indeed something to fear; but, how much to be *preferred* is this *fear* to the *hope* of those who hold the popular view — the hope of living in an atmosphere, which is to be eternally polluted with the smoke of the torments of the damned.

evidence of the Word of God and the works of God is clearly opposed to the popular doctrine — if he comes to the conclusion that *no conceivable revelation could any how prove* the truth of such a doctrine, what a wondrous weight will be removed from his spirit, what a glorious sense of freedom will he experience, what an accession of peace and happiness may he expect!

The *effects* moreover which, as it will be seen, proceed from a belief in this doctrine are so *mischievous* that it is the *duty* of every man to enter upon the enquiry; and, when he comes to the conclusion that the traditionary notion is false, it is his *duty* to *publish* the conclusion to which he has come.

It is the *duty* of every man to do all in his power to lessen the number of those who suffer under the crushing fear that they themselves or those dear to them may incur this dreadful doom — to lessen the number of those whom religious despair drives by degrees into hopeless lunacy.

It is the duty of every man to do all in his power in order to save those whose sinking spirits are, from natural and unavoidable causes, reduced almost to exhaustion, from being harassed in their *last hours* by *horrible apprehensions* of *endless suffering* in the world to come.

It is the *duty* of every man to use what means he possesses to prevent the minds of timid children from being troubled with fears of the "dreadful hell and everlasting pains".

These being his *duties* a man cannot conscientiously allow the popular view of the nature and duration of the punishment of the wicked (when he has found that view to be a delusion) to go uncontradicted.

They too who hold it a *mischievous result* that the Judge and Ruler of the earth should be charged with conduct which, in another, would be called *infinite cruelty* must hold that it is their *duty* readily to listen to any evidence which claims to vindicate the Almighty from such a charge, and that it is their *duty*, when convinced, to aid in opposing and, if possible, silencing that teaching according to which the blessed consummation of things, the *completion of the eternal scheme* which was in the mind of God when he created man, is to be *everlasting torment* for the *many*, and *happiness in sight of this torment* for the *few*.

They again who hold it a *mischievous result* that the religion of Christ should have needless hindrances placed in the way of its progress must hold it to be their *duty* (especially if they admit the obligation of the apostolic injunc-

tion "Prove all things") to examine whatever evidence is offered, against a doctrine which, as long as it is allowed to be regarded as one of the doctrines of Christ, will keep a large class of men from joining the Christian community.

The fact of this doctrine of everlasting torment being regarded as an essential doctrine of our religion would alone suffice to account for the general rejection of Christianity by the Jews, whose views of the character of God and of future-world punishments are, at any rate more reasonable than those of the advocates of mediæval and modern popular Christianity.

A searcher after truth acts, it must be admitted, only reasonably who refuses to give his attention to any *so-called* revelation of which the doctrine of everlasting torment *really* forms a part; for he may justly argue that if God's notion of mercy is so widely different from our notion of mercy, his notion of truth may be as widely different from our notion of truth, and hence that it is idle to enquire what further the revelation may contain.

All lovers of liberty of conscience, as soon as they have convinced themselves of the falsehood of the popular doctrine, ought vigorously to attack

it, as a *mischievous superstition* and root it out of men's minds, for a most potent reason. As long as this doctrine prevails, so long will society have to fear the recurrence of *sanguinary religious persecutions*; for as long as men hold this doctrine, so long their convictions *may* and indeed *ought* to lead them to resort to any means however violent and however destructive of the peace of society, to go the length of sacrificing, if need be, the present enjoyment of every member of the community, of subjecting *every member of the community* to discomfort, to misery, to *pain however excruciating*, provided only that through these means there seems a *possibility* that the number of those condemned to everlasting torment may be lessened even by *one*.

Many who find it hard to believe the popular Protestant doctrine of the everlasting torment of the majority of mankind — the attempt to realize the truth of the doctrine in the case of some particular person being that which frequently makes the difficulty of accepting it seem insuperable — are induced to accept as less revolting, the Romish doctrine of Purgatory\* and with it the claim of the Roman Church to infallibility. This affords another reason why

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\* See Appendix.

those who regard that Church as the great enemy of spiritual and intellectual freedom, should resolve, as soon as they have convinced themselves that the popular Protestant doctrine is false, openly and at once to express their rejection and abhorrence of it.

The popular doctrine ought, if proved false, to be at once repudiated and banished from the earth, for this further *mischievous effect* which belongs to it.

They who believe that God will torment some of his creatures everlastingly persuade themselves that it is just and right that there should be this *infinite disproportion between offences and their punishment*.<sup>\*</sup> Now what a mischievous effect upon a man's moral nature must, in many instances,

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<sup>\*</sup> An attempt has been made to establish some proportion between sins and their punishment by assuming that the condemned continue to sin everlastingly as well as to suffer everlastingly (glorious consummation!).

This hypothesis, however, does not really affect the difficulty or lessen the injustice; for it is not denied by the holders of this hypothesis that a man, by his sins during the brief period of earthly life, fixes unalterably his fate for eternity — whether continued sin on his part is, or is not, involved in the misery of his future state is really nothing to the point.

be produced by his being forced to acknowledge as just and right what is indeed the height of injustice and cruelty.

It would be interesting to know to what extent the cruel oppressions, under which men have groaned in different ages and countries, have been owing to the belief of the oppressors in the popular view of God's future judgment of the wicked.

Nothing can be more certain than that persons placed in authority, sovereigns, legislators, judges, lords, slaveowners, heads of families, have consciously or unconsciously been influenced in the use they have made of their more or less limited power, by the views they have entertained of the manner in which God exercises or will exercise his unlimited power over his creatures.

What wonder, if they who believe that God will hereafter punish, not to correct, not to deter, not to destroy and remove from his world useless or pernicious objects, but in vindication of his own insulted dignity; and who believe that he will punish the offences of a few years, with torment lasting for ever — what wonder, if such people are, in their limited sphere, vindictive and unrelenting — if they, in their punishments,

do not seek to lessen the misery in the world by correcting the authors of the misery, or by removing them mercifully out of the way; but rather seek to satisfy their own vindictive feelings, barbarously inflicting pain because pain has been inflicted. What wonder, if rich men who believe that He, to whom all things belong and whose happiness is complete, will withhold the means of relief, not for a time but for all eternity, from myriads of his suffering creatures — what wonder, if rich men should sometimes seem to justify themselves in their selfish enjoyment of their good things for the brief term of life — what wonder, if they should sometimes be found withholding the means of relief from the poor, and hardening their hearts against the miseries of the wretched.

A belief which has been, and still is, the fruitful source of so much misery — a belief which has been the cause of so much mental depression, torturing fear, and melancholy madness — a belief which has ever been, and must ever be, a hindrance to the extension of Christianity and which is so certainly calculated to make those placed in authority justify themselves in acts of injustice — such a belief, so mischievous to humanity, we ought not credulously to accept without enquiry, nor after we

have proved it to be without foundation, ought we, without earnest protest and active opposition, to suffer it to be further propagated.

I do not forget that it may be urged on the other side, that in particular cases some *good* effects have resulted from a belief in this doctrine, as where, for instance, it has stimulated Christian missionaries to put forth their utmost exertions in order to rescue their fellow men from the imagined dreadful doom of the unbelieving; or where a man's gratitude for his own soul's deliverance from this doom has led him to labour zealously for the spiritual good of others.

Such *good* effects however are, it seems to me, as dust in the balance when weighed against the many *mischievous* effects above mentioned.

The good effects which, it may be said, are produced by this doctrine as a *restraining influence* on the most vicious members of society are also in comparison inconsiderable. The fact is, that when Christians in general acted consistently with a belief in this doctrine, then, the less steadfast members of the Christian community, might well feel its restraining influence. Now-a-days however circumstances are altogether different. Not one in a thousand of those who preach this doctrine acts consistently with his belief in it. Conse-

quently although it is preached it makes little impression. Strong-nerved hardened ruffians have the word "hell" on their tongue every hour of the day; while not they, but sensitive soft-hearted children, invalids with shattered nerves, poor suffering souls in the agonies of death, are those upon whom this diabolical dogma presses its cruel weight.

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### III.

*The old theory of punishment and the new. — On the just suffering for the unjust. — In what way and in what degree the virtuous are responsible for the sins of the vicious.*

At the root of all the wrong notions about the punishments of a future world, and indeed about present-world punishments is the ancient and almost universal delusion, that when an offence is committed there is some *inherent propriety* in inflicting pain on the offender, and a degree of pain according to the degree of guilt.

It has never been shewn — it can never be shewn, that there is any such inherent propriety.

As far as punishment exercises a deterrent influence upon the offender himself or upon others, so far is punishment justifiable.

The degree of punishment, however, should, in each case, depend not upon the degree of guilt, but upon what is required to serve effectually as a deterrent.

There is no propriety in punishing a person *at all* for his offences, however great they may have been, unless the pain he suffers is less than that which the infliction of the punishment averts from him or from the community.

Take an extreme case — a case of the utmost conceivable guilt. Imagine a person born under the most favourable circumstances and who has enjoyed from the first every advantage in the way of virtuous and Christian training, in due time occupying a position in life where temptations are the fewest and where the surroundings are most favourable to the development of good qualities — imagine this person, notwithstanding, plunging into the most extreme wickedness, revelling in every kind of vice, turning a deaf ear to all calls to repentance, sinning and as long as he lives continuing to sin, against the light, reckless of consequences in this and in the future world.

There would be no sense or propriety, I maintain, in inflicting upon such a person any punishment whatever, unless the pain he suffered would be likely to avert a greater pain from himself or from the community. For let us consider what led the wretched man to run his strange, headlong, wicked course. The hypothesis being that his outward circumstances were specially favourable, the cause of his offences must be attributed to the corrupt state of his soul. But how did his soul get into this corrupt state? The habit of sin had gradually grown upon him. But the first act of wilful sin,

why did he commit that? Because his nature was weak and sinful and he did not ask for supernatural help. How came his nature to be thus faulty, and how came it about that he did not, on occasion of his first sin, ask for supernatural help? He was born with a faulty nature, and he did not ask for supernatural help — either because of the faulty nature which he was born with, or for some cause unconnected with his faulty nature. In either case where is the propriety in punishing him for this his first offence? Or where is the propriety in punishing him for his subsequent offences except in the degree and with the object I have stated, even if he has, as we suppose, deliberately committed the greatest wickedness, in defiance of the Law-giver and his law, in the full belief that he was incurring, and justly incurring, the extremest conceivable consequences in the way of penalty?

But we may put the case, as fully as it need be put, in very few words. Assume a man's life to have been as bad as it could have been. Assume each sin he committed was aggravated by every possible circumstance. Assume the worst motives prompted him always in all that he did. Still what *propriety* is there in punishing him, except in the degree and with the object I have mentioned?

It rests with those who hold the popular theory of punishment to shew its reasonableness. I allow that there exists a very general, and that until very recent times there did exist an almost universal, belief in a certain propriety in inflicting punishment on an offender — a propriety founded on the fact of the *past offence* and having no reference at all to the *future*. But nothing has ever been said to shew the reasonableness of this so general notion. The notion indeed is altogether unreasonable and wrong.

This notion has been the source of unmeasured mischief. It has encouraged people to cherish vindictive feelings against one another, and to enact sanguinary and savage laws. It has tended very much to give countenance and confirmation to the doctrine I am engaged in refuting — that doctrine so baneful to the soul's peace and happiness — the doctrine of the inexorable vindictiveness of God, or of the everlasting torment of the wicked.

Punishment ought to have reference always to the future, and only to the future, and never at all to the past, except so far as the past enables one to judge of the future.

In general, that is the most proper punishment, on whomsoever inflicted, in which the ratio

of the pain inflicted to the pain averted is the least possible.

Vicarious suffering, the just at times suffering for the unjust, the sins of fathers being visited on the children, is not merely a doctrine of the Bible, and an observed law of the God-governed world, it is also an arrangement of which reason can approve, in respect of its working well, in respect of the beneficial effects which result from it.

Some persons who, by their admirers, are esteemed advanced thinkers shew their subjection to old prejudices when they express themselves on this point. "To punish some one for another's transgression", says Strauss,\* "to accept even the voluntary suffering of the innocent and let the guilty escape scathless in consequence — this everybody admits now is a barbarous action; to consider it matter of indifference in regard to a moral or a pecuniary debt whether it be discharged by the debtor or by some one else in his stead is, everybody now admits, a barbarous conception."

Everybody who will observe and reflect must admit, that few things, perhaps *nothing*, so tends to elevate and spiritualize a man's character as

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\* *The Old Faith and the New.*

for him to suffer, voluntarily and patiently suffer, for others; and that few things so tend to soften the hard heart of a very bad man as the sight and the thought of suffering endured by others, and they the innocent and uncomplaining, on his account, for his fault.

Shakespeare is true to nature when he attributes the conversion of Oliver in "*As You Like It*" to the effect, the almost irresistible effect produced by the selfsacrificing generosity displayed by the injured on behalf of the injurer.

The theory of punishment I advocate, which would punish with reference solely to the future and with a view simply to the gradual diminution of the aggregate amount of suffering in the world — the theory which would punish the guilty, not necessarily according to their degree of guilt, but according to what may be needed for effectually deterring offenders — the theory which admits of the innocent suffering for the guilty when, as will often be the case, the desired end will thereby be most easily secured — this theory needs but to be clearly stated to be approved of by every candid, intelligent and reflecting mind.

Nor let it be thought that this theory is by any means opposed to the idea of responsibility. It does indeed shift, in a considerable degree,

the responsibility from the ignorant, the weak, and the bad, to the instructed, the strong-minded, and the good. When great crimes are brought to light, those members of the community who possess the most intelligence, they who are the most virtuous, they who have the making of the laws may rightly be said to have something to *answer for*. They may well ask themselves. — “Have we, who possess intelligence to know how human conduct may be controlled, we who are calm and cool to make wise plans, we who are entrusted with power to modify in great measure the circumstances on which the conduct of others will more or less depend, — have we done our part to deter those members of the community who have only a small share of intelligence and virtue from committing crimes for which they must inevitably suffer and for which we and society in general must also suffer in a degree?”

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#### IV.

*General remarks on the Scripture doctrine. — Old Testament doctrine. — General remarks on the New Testament doctrine. — Doctrine of the Gospels. — Comments on particular passages. — St. Paul's doctrine and comments thereon. — Examination of passages quoted on the popular side. — On the imperfection of human faculties. Everlasting punishment, not everlasting pain.*

I do not pretend to assert that there are no passages of Scripture which, at *first sight*, seem to support the popular theory of endless suffering. The question here is (as the question usually is, in matters where only moral proof can be adduced) on which side is the preponderating weight of evidence. Isolated passages may be found in the Scriptures which, at first sight — taken in their more obvious sense, seem to teach transubstantiation, others which seem to support views held exclusively by the Society of Friends, others which seem to favour the views of the Universalists, others which seem to sanction slavery; but if for *one* passage which seems to tell in favour of a particular doctrine, there are *fifty* which seem, just as clearly, to tell against it, we ought not to hesitate (and members of the Church of England do not hesitate, in such instances

as those referred to above) to pronounce the Scripture doctrine to be that which the fifty passages teach.\*

If the commonly received doctrine were true, if every body were in danger of taking a course which had everlasting torment for its end, human existence would be simply a most fearful curse. Is there however a single instance in the Bible where existence is described as a curse to mankind in general?

It is said indeed of Judas "It had been good for that man if he had not been born" but this no more proves that even *his* life was a curse to him than the saying of S. Paul 1 Cor. vii, 1: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" proves that married life is a curse.

Had Judas *not* been born in the age, in which he *was* born, he could not have become the betrayer of Jesus, and, under other circumstances, his career might have been less guilty and his end less wretched.

Every thoughtful man must admit that no one who had in view anything at all resembling the popular notion of everlasting torment in hell,

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\* The reader is assumed to be a believer in the Divine authority of the Bible, and in the actual, if not seeming, agreement in doctrine of the Bible writers.

could possibly have spoken of Judas in such marvellously mild terms. I know few passages in the Bible that to me appear to tell more strongly against the popular notion of hell than does this passage concerning Judas.

Surely if it implies anything, it implies that his was an exceptionally unhappy fate, and that in general, existence is a very decided blessing to a human being; whereas if there were any truth in the popular doctrine of hell, then human existence could be regarded only as a monstrous curse.

If the popular doctrine were true, is it conceivable that Moses and God's prophets, who came after him, would, in seeking to deter their fellow countrymen from breaking the divine commandments have dwelt, as they did, on the *temporal* evils which would in consequence befall them or *their distant descendants* and that they would not rather have dwelt on the *infinite torment* to which every individual man was making himself liable by continuing in his sinful courses.

See Deut. xxviii. 45—58, Deut. xxix, 22—25.

Jer. v. 15—19, Hos. ix. 17, Amos iii. 11 & 15.

Amos vi. 14, ix. 8, Hab. i. 6.

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The general doctrine of the Old Testament is that the wicked will be rooted out, will perish,

will cease to be, will come to an end, will be burnt up.

Psalm xxxvii 9 "rooted out",  
 10 "clean gone",  
 20 "perish", "consume away",  
 22 "rooted out",  
 29 "rooted out",  
 39 "perish", "rooted out at the last",

Ps. xciv. 23 "The Lord our God shall *destroy* them".

civ. 35 "Consumed", "come to an end".

Proverbs x. 25 "So is the wicked *no more*".

x. 29 "Destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity".

xii. 7 "The wicked are overthrown and are not".

Malachi iv. 1 "Behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud and all that do wickedly shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall *burn them up* that it shall *leave them neither root nor branch*."

Isaiah i. 28. "And the *destruction* of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be *consumed*."\*

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\* They who regard these passages as referring to the fate of the wicked in *this* world (the question whether the passages have this limited meaning is not a material

On the face of the matter it certainly appears that this doctrine forms no part of the Gospel of Christ. Else how is it rightly called *Gospel*? Is it "good news" to tell me that there is a possibility or a probability that after I die I shall be tormented everlastingly?

Would the news that such a horrible fate possibly awaited them have been accounted "good" by those to whom the Gospel was first preached?

The goodness of the news, it may perhaps be said, consisted in this — that a way was pointed out to men by which they not only might escape that dreadful doom which otherwise would have been theirs; but by which they might even attain to a life of never-ending happiness. The Gospel, it may be said, as it is popularly represented, can justly be called good news for all men; inasmuch as all men may avoid the threatened punishment and obtain for themselves the promised reward *if they choose*. To this I would reply — He, who according to this theory made a man's everlasting happiness or misery dependant on his choice *knew*, in each case, *what his choice would be* — knew, that for some reason or for

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one) must then admit that the Old Testament is *altogether silent* on the subject of the *ultimate* fate of the wicked — a very significant fact.

some want of reason many would make a *fatally unhappy choice*.

To that large number whose deliberate choice of evil the Omniscient foresees, how can the Christian revelation, as popularly interpreted, be presented and proclaimed as good tidings?

It would surely be infinitely more reasonable for an Atheist to describe as a *Gospel* his proof (if he professes to have one) that there is no God.

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The general doctrine of the New Testament is that the wicked will *die*, will be *destroyed*, will *perish*, will be *burnt up*.

Mat. iii. 12. "He will *burn up* the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Mat. vii. 13. "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction."

Mat. xvi. 25. "Whosoever will save his life shall *lose it*."

Gal. vi. 8. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

Phil. iii. 19. "Whose end is *destruction*."

ii. Thes. i. 9. "Who shall be punished with everlasting *destruction* from the presence of the Lord."

Rom. viii. 13. "If ye live after the flesh ye shall *die*."

vi. 21. "The end of those things is *death*."

vi. 23. "The wages of sin is *death*."

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There are many other passages in the Gospels clear and unambiguous in their meaning which, while they accord with the doctrine here taught, are utterly irreconcilable with the popular doctrine.

Luke vi. 35. "He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

Who can find words strong enough to express the ridiculous inconsistency of asserting that the God who is "kind to the unthankful and to the evil", after keeping them in this world for seventy years, feeding them sometimes plentifully, sometimes sparingly, clothing them sometimes in warm garments, sometimes in rags, giving them friends and not removing from them enemies, sometimes giving them health and ease, sometimes sickness and pain, sometimes cheering them with bright hopes, and sometimes suffering their souls to be troubled with terrible fears, will, when they have at length passed through the solemn death-struggle, preserve their liberated souls, only to subject them to *torment without end* and without intermission.

If such treatment as this were consistent with kindness what conceivable cruelty would be inconsistent with it?

Luke vi. 36. They who receive the exhortation "Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful" as a command of Christ binding upon men, cannot with consistency at the same time accept any view of God's dealings which represents Our Heavenly Father as doing or purposing that which, if done by a man in his dealings with his fellow-men, would be called *infinitely cruel*. Otherwise the text would be an exhortation to men to be relentless and cruel to the full extent of their power.

Mat. xii. 12. "How much then is a man better than a sheep."

Luke xii. 6. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings and not one of them is forgotten before God."

Luke xii. 7. "Ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Were the popular doctrine true, the sheep, the sparrow, the worm we crush beneath our feet, instead of being in a worse position than man, would be in a position infinitely preferable to man's. The pleasures of these creatures seem to outweigh their pains very decidedly. No animal has, as far as we can judge, the brightness of

its life at all clouded by the fear (which most men have felt sometimes) of everlasting torment.

This is at any rate one advantage which, for thousands of years, the inferior animals have enjoyed over men.

If these creatures not only have *no fear* of future torments; but also have *no future torments to fear*, what sane man, who holds the popular doctrine, would not gladly consent to descend from his higher place in the scale of creation and choose rather to be a worm than a human being? Who would not willingly give up the hope of living hereafter, in order to be secure from this possibility of being everlastingly tormented?

If brute beasts participated in the popular belief with regard to the destiny of man, what just objects of pity would the lords of the creation become in their eyes!

Luke xii. 47. "Shall be beaten with many stripes."

It is very important to observe, that the people to whom these words were addressed, were accustomed to regard, and had been taught by God's Law to regard thirty nine as *many* stripes.

Luke xix. 41—44. Would Jesus have been so strongly moved at the anticipation of the mere destruction of Jerusalem and the short-

lived miseries of the siege, had he had in his mind's eye anything in the least resembling the popular representation of hell — had he been able to picture to himself the myriads of human beings, Jews and Gentiles who, according to the popular notion, will be writhing in fearful torment to all eternity in hell.

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We now come to the evidence of S. Paul. In the course of his fourteen epistles, all of which contain Christian doctrine, what does he say of this most important of all doctrines? Does he make use of it to strengthen his exhortations? Does he often dwell upon it and enlarge upon it?

Paul was evidently a man able to feel intensely and to speak forcibly. Could such a man who can and does describe his own sufferings with such telling effect — could he, if he had believed that millions of people would suffer to all eternity, pains as intense as, or more intense than, he had ever suffered — could he have *passed over* such everlasting sufferings *altogether without notice*?

Paul refers indeed many times to the punishment and end of the wicked — *destruction and death* are threatened again and again to the worldly — to those who live after the flesh and

not after the spirit; but though we may search his writings from beginning to end, we shall find no hint that a human being or indeed any other being will be doomed to suffer *pain everlastingly*.

Nothing can be easier than for a man who holds the popular doctrine to find expressions to convey to others the doctrine he holds. To do this, requires no inspiration, nor genius, nor extraordinary power. "The wicked will be tormented everlastingly as with fire and brimstone" — "they will be for ever in extreme pain" — "they will live for ever in extreme suffering" — "their existence will be, throughout its everlasting continuance a bitter curse to them".

Where are any such expressions as these to be found in the Epistles of S. Paul? Several passages in which this apostle has made direct and clear reference to the punishment of the wicked have been quoted above. There are in his Epistles a few other passages which may be noticed here affording, as they do, evidence indirect indeed, but very forcible against the popular theory.

Rom. ix. 3. "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Paul could surely never have written thus\* if the being accursed from Christ involved everlasting torment.

Rom. viii. 18. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Does\*\* he ever say or hint that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the sufferings of the *condemned*? On the supposition that he held the popular view, it would have been a very natural remark for him to have made. Since the popular doctrine has been generally held, this comparison has been made a thousand times.

Rom. ii. 7. "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life."

In the age of the writer of this Epistle, Christians appear to have regarded *immortality*, not as an inherent quality of the soul, but as something to be *sought for*.

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\* See also Acts xiii. 46.

\*\* Our Lord indeed makes quite a contrary statement. Mat. xxiv. 21. "Then shall be great tribulation such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time nor ever shall be."

The immortality of the soul, it should be observed, is nowhere taught in the Scriptures.

Plato who, attempts to *prove* the doctrine attempts, it will be remembered, at the same time and with equal success (that is to say, with no success at all) to prove the soul's *pre-existence*.

Bishop Butler's well known argument for the immortality of the *human* soul, if it proves anything proves also the immortality of the *souls of insects*.

There are a few passages which, in respect of their being frequently quoted in support of the popular view, deserve notice.

Mat. xviii. 34. "Till he should pay all that was due unto him."

"How", it is asked, "could he ever pay this enormous debt of ten thousand talents?" It appears however from verse 27, that the debt of ten thousand talents had been *forgiven* him. Whether the debts which he had since contracted were heavy or not, we are not informed. But even if he had still been indebted ten thousand talents "a chance may *win* what by mischance was *lost*", he might by inventing, let us suppose, some useful machine and selling his interest in it have discharged his obligations. At

any rate "with God all things are possible." — He who enables rich men to enter into the kingdom of God — notwithstanding that it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye — can be trusted to find means to enable poor men to get out of the hands of their tormentors.

Mark ix. 44. "Their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

These words, it should be observed, are a quotation from Isaiah lxvi. 24. In this last-named passage they are used, we see, of the *senseless* carcases of the dead.

In the parallel passage in S. Matthew's Gospel (Mat. xviii. 6) we have the words "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Here the *millstone about the neck* and the *depth of the sea* are terms added to convey more forcibly the idea of *complete destruction* by water. The expression Mark. ix. 43: "fire that never shall be quenched" may similarly have been used to convey with greater force the notion of *complete destruction* by the other element.

They who ask what is the use of an everlasting fire (see also Mat. xxv. 41) if the body is

consumed\*, and consequently does not feel it, are invited to consider what is the use of the sea being deep if only the man is drowned.

It may be added that the fire would be *worse than useless* if the body *did* everlastingly *feel it*.

The fact of the fire being everlasting no more implies that the torment of burning in it will be everlasting, than the fact of the sea being bottomless would imply that the pain of drowning in it would be everlasting.

I take the sense of the passage Mark. ix. 43 to be this. — It is better for a man to suffer the loss of fortune, fame, friends or whatever he may possess that is dear to him, and enter the Christian community, and thus attain the everlasting life promised to Christians who are faithful unto the end, than to live a self-indulgent worldly life here, and be condemned hereafter to an ignominious death — to a punishment resembling that of the worst class of Jewish criminals, whose dead bodies were cast into the ever-burning fire in the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna); or, in other words “It is better to judge yourselves now, to submit to a bodily privation *for a time*, than to be

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\* Compare Mat. iii. 13: here the fire is represented as *unquenchable* although the chaff is burnt up.

judged and condemned hereafter by Christ, and to have to submit to the deprivation of life and being — the complete loss of body and soul *for all time*.

Rev. xiv. 10, 11. Rev. xx. 10. The view of the punishment of the wicked which these passages *at first sight* seem to disclose is entirely opposed to views, which are *repeatedly* presented to us in other parts of the Scriptures; (see the numerous passages from the Old and New Testament quoted and referred to above) — moreover, the infliction of such a punishment, as here seems to be threatened, would be utterly inconsistent with God's *character* as revealed in the Bible, and as shewn forth in his works in the world. See especially Luke vi. 35 commented on above. See also Psalm cxxxvi, 1. 2. 3. . . . 26. 1 Joh. iv. 16.

There is, therefore, good reason why we should maintain that, *as in the case of the texts which seemingly teach transubstantiation*, the more obvious meaning cannot be the correct meaning.

We must perhaps be content to class these two passages with such passages as Exodus xxii. 18, Joshua x. 13, Heb. vii. 3, and leave them, as we leave these others, unexplained.

It is not necessary to lay any stress on the fact that the claim of The Revelation of S. John

to be regarded, as of Divine authority, has been questioned by some eminent Biblical critics — among others, as is well known, by Luther.

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To that class of reasoners who assert that men are, by reason of the imperfection of their faculties, incompetent to determine what conduct in God is, and what is not, consistent with perfect goodness, it may be answered, that if this be the case, the advocates of *any kind of devil-worship* may, on the same ground, defend the conduct which they attribute to *their* Divinity.

On the same ground the advocates of the worship of the gods of Greece and Rome might have stopped the mouths of Christians who took exception to the filthy conduct attributed to the objects of heathen worship.

Moreover, if we are not competent to distinguish between cruelty and its opposite — if what seems to us exactly like *cruelty* in the popular representation of the Divine judgments is, after all, *not unmercifulness*, it is equally probable that, hereafter, what will feel to the good precisely like *pain* may be what is intended in the Divine promises by *happiness* and *reward*.

They who ask us to believe the popular doctrine, need to shew us that in accepting their conclusion, that some of God's creatures will be

tormented everlastingly, we shall be following and trusting some better, some less fallible, guides than our own reason and conscience and senses: and how in the nature of things can this be shewn?

The reason, the conscience and the senses are all, one must admit, fallible; but they are nevertheless the best guides we have, and in the ordinary and in the extraordinary events of life we are generally content to trust them. If a man distrusting his *own* reason and conscience and senses, places himself under the guidance of some ecclesiastical authority, he has still, at the best, nothing more trustworthy to rest upon, than the judgment formed by fallible human reason assisted by fallible human conscience and by fallible human senses.

This is *at the best*. But it may be that the chosen guide is a deceiver; and thus it may happen that the man who is afraid to trust his own fallible judgment, follows that which is really *not the true but the pretended judgment* of another. This risk every man must run who delegates to another the task of judging for him what he shall believe.

Each man so acting, evidently brings into the question, already hard to determine and liable

from its complexity to mislead, a new and additional element of uncertainty.

When a man judges for himself, he may know at least that *his* reason, *his* conscience and *his* senses have concurred in leading him to certain conclusions; but when he leaves it to another to judge for him, he cannot be assured that the conclusions put before him are approved by the reason or by the conscience or by the senses of *any man*.

Before concluding this Chapter, I must not omit to offer a few words of explanation, concerning the expression "everlasting punishment". Mat. xxv. 46. The question as to the proper signification of the word here rendered "everlasting", interesting and important as it may be, is not one upon which I see any necessity to enter. Scholars may fill volumes with arguments on one side and on the other; but the ordinary reader may nevertheless remain unconvinced. A long and learned discussion is not needed to refute the popular doctrine — and this is all I undertake to do — however much it may be needed to settle the precise meaning of the general teaching of Scripture on the subject of the future world. By everlasting punishment we need not understand an everlasting continuance of excessive pain — everlasting punishment need not

involve pain at all — a withholding of happiness is punishment, and an everlasting withholding of happiness, by deprivation of life, for instance, would therefore be everlasting punishment.\*

“Everlasting punishment” is not indeed opposed to, nor inconsistent with, the enjoyment of a certain, even a great amount of happiness, if that amount of happiness is less than it would have been, had the punishment not been inflicted. Although there may not be any good reason for supposing, that this expression is intended to convey the meaning last suggested; nevertheless it deserves to be noticed, not only that there is, in the expression, nothing that is irreconcilable with the theory, that the wicked will come to an end, but that there is nothing in it that is opposed even to the extreme views of the Universalists.

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\* Some persons seem to find a difficulty in believing that a human soul *can* be destroyed. Such persons however must admit that it can be rendered insensible for a certain period; for it is insensible in sleep during nearly one third of the period of human life. A sound sleep infinitely prolonged, is virtually destruction.

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## V.

*The Popular doctrine not provable by any conceivable revelation.*

They who ground their belief in the doctrine of everlasting torment, on a passage which they find in some book, ought first to satisfy themselves thoroughly on two points:

(1) that the passage in question is a genuine portion of some writing of Divine authority.

(2) that the passage can only have the commonly received meaning.

For those who have arrived at the conclusion, that the particular passage certainly forms part of a work, which certainly is of Divine authority, and at the further conclusion, that the passage in question cannot possibly have any other than the commonly received meaning, there will yet remain a difficult task, viz. to assure themselves, that when that which God threatens is, *according to our sense* of the words, *neither „merciful” nor “just”* it is necessarily, *according to our sense of the word “true”*.

To take an imaginary and extreme case — suppose it were clearly proved, that God had declared,

that certain of his creatures would be condemned by him to everlasting torment, and suppose further, what is entirely, opposed to experience (see Chap. VII) that there existed around us, instances of creatures suffering severe pain without being worn out by it — creatures that presented every appearance of being about to live on for ever, still in extreme pain — then, although we might believe that he, who shewed such insensibility to suffering in the instances around us, might purpose to torment these same wretched creatures, or others, possibly even for ever; yet still it would be the height of rashness to assume that such a being would consign to this punishment *the particular class* or description of persons threatened. — If God is conceived as supremely cruel, what security have we that he is not supremely capricious? — such a being then would be *equally likely* to select some *quite other class* and description of persons for the punishment in question.

A creator, who to attain *any* end should appoint everlasting torment for *any one* of his creatures, or who should place any one of his creatures in such a position that that creature might possibly *bring upon himself* everlasting torment, when the creator might easily (for instance, simply by abstaining altogether from

the exercise of creative power) have contrived that *no one* of his creatures should thus suffer — such a creator would be entirely undeserving of trust; what he had revealed, it would be idle and useless to ascertain; his *word* would be *utterly worthless*.

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## VI.

*Appeal to Bishops and Christian Ministers to abstain from teaching or countenancing any longer the doctrine in question.*

Those who profess to feel the obligation to “speak good of His Name” (and here I appeal especially to Bishops and Christian Ministers), those who profess to stand in awe of blaspheming God, I would earnestly entreat to consider well before they do anything further, tending in any way, to promote the belief in a doctrine, which is here shewn to be utterly without foundation — to be *unproved* and *unprovable* — and which, if false, it must needs be the height of impiety to propagate.

They who are in authority in the Church are not doing their duty in this matter by merely abstaining from teaching the popular doctrine. Bishops are, by their consecration vows, bound “with all faithful diligence to *banish and drive away* all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God’s word”. If all erroneous doctrine ought to be banished, surely this popular doctrine of the everlasting torment of the wicked ought not to be excepted — this doctrine which dares to

attribute to the Supreme Being the worst of vices — cruelty, and moreover a degree of cruelty altogether beyond human experience.

It is to be hoped that there are not, in our days, any who share the feeling which was exhibited by the Hebrew Prophet, who preached of old to the Ninevites. Jonah would have preferred, as it seems, that the inhabitants of Nineveh should have been destroyed and that his word, or his interpretation of God's word, should thus have been verified, rather than that the Ninevites should have been spared at the expense of his reputation as a prophet.

It would speak ill for human nature, if the holders of the popular creed would be *other than exceedingly glad* to be convinced, and to admit, that with respect to this doctrine of everlasting torment, they have been in grievous error. The time is certainly at hand when they will have to make the admission. *The dogma is doomed.*

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## VII.

*Teaching of God's works. — No traces in the world of the hand of an everlasting torturer.*

We come now to the consideration of what the works of God teach on the subject in question.

It is reasonable to conclude that God's future judgments will be foreshadowed upon earth, and that, if his character be such as it is represented to be by the advocates of the popular doctrine, there will be marks of that character to be traced in this world which he made, and which he governs.

What evidence is there in the world that the world's Ruler is such a Being as God is, according to that view of his character which supposes that he will torment some of his creatures, viz. bad men, everlastingly?

At any rate he has not made the earthly existence of his creatures miserable and a curse. People, in general, set some value on their life. If they did not — if the good did not predominate over the evil, such people at least as were un-

believers in a future state, would bring their life to an end. The comparative infrequency of suicide, even among Atheists, shews that life is generally esteemed a blessing. Birthdays are celebrated with joy and not with mourning — this again shews that existence is regarded not as a curse but as a blessing.

The being deprived of life is usually regarded as one of the severest of punishments. In spite of its many vexations and pains, life is generally held dear, for it is perceived and felt that its evils have their fixed limits, their reliefs, their consolations.

The most down-trodden and unfortunate have often, from the nature of their situation, more hopes and fewer fears than others, while to the few good things they possess they are wont to attach a very high value. "The art of their necessities" making "vile things precious."

We are generally more or less prepared for our heaviest troubles. Their full weight comes upon us by degrees. The back becomes accustomed little by little to the increasing burden.

When a man is subjected to excessive pain he faints and passes into a state of unconsciousness.

Paroxysms of pain are usually followed by intervals of delicious rest. Thus, they who endure the bitterest sufferings are usually compensated by experiencing the sweetest enjoyments, the sense of relief from violent pain being one of the most intense of pleasures.

In old age when bodily ailments multiply the sense of pain has lost its acuteness.

The pain, great as it may be, which we suffer at the loss of loved friends is generally evidence of the yet *greater pleasure*, which we derived from our intercourse with them whilst they were with us.

Those pains which are proverbially some of the sharpest suffered by human beings — the pains of childbirth are often cheerfully anticipated — it being felt that these pains, however great, are overbalanced by the higher enjoyment to which they lead, viz. the possession of children.

A class of persons who are generally accounted to have endured the most intense pains, religious martyrs, there is reason to suppose, actually suffered but little. "There are very strong grounds for believing", writes an eminent physician\*, that where there is great enthusiasm,

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\* J. Burney Yeo M. D. *Why is Pain a Mystery?*

or great mental exaltation, and emotional excitement, such as accompany many forms of self-sacrifice, as for instance in cases of religious martyrdom, *ordinary physical sensibility is well nigh extinguished.*

Not only are there no traces of the hand of an unrelenting torturer in the condition *of men* — we look in vain for any traces of such a Being's hand *in the world* around us.

Do we find *any* creatures in the world enduring uninterrupted and excessive pain? On the contrary, by a beneficent law, universal in its operation, excessive pain ever tends to wear out the sentient being, and so to bring the suffering to an end.

Compensations of various kinds mitigate the severity of almost every kind of suffering. All creatures are so constituted that as they become *used to*, they become more or less *at ease in*, any condition of existence.

One may with confidence assert, that in the whole realm of nature nothing can be shewn which gives any countenance to the doctrine of everlasting torment.

The world, indeed, is not all smiling sunshine; but even when Nature frowns she is not cruel: her wrath, although it may fill the imagination, for the time with terror, is soon appeased.

The terrible thunderstorm may fill us with awe — may cause us to pause and to listen to its deep-toned voice; but although it sweeps in its fury over a city containing a million of men, it strikes perhaps but one, and if it strikes mortally, it brings to that one, death neither lingering nor painful. And when the storm has ceased, the whole region of the air has been purified.

An earthquake, again, destroys its victims without putting them to protracted pain. In a moment they are engulfed and their sufferings are over — they are not preserved to linger on during a life time in agony.

And when Pestilence visits a country, and its approach from city to city is heralded by fear, although its fancied form is terrible, yet to call it an unmixed evil is to miscall it. It is a stern preacher of the obligation of cleanliness, and temperance, and of the truth that the whole community is responsible for the condition of its poorest and most degraded members — that the highest members of the community must expect to be called upon to pay for their neglect of the humblest. The lesson necessary for our well-being which milder masters have failed to teach, this stern-featured but not vindictive instructor forces upon our reluctant attention. Those,

moreover, who are the victims of pestilence have, usually, a very brief term of suffering.

The history of mankind and of the material world shews us that progress and improvement, not retrogression and decline, are the laws of the Universe.

Where "dragons tare each other in their slime" — where our savage progenitors practised their only art, the art of preparing flint stones to fling at each other's heads — there men learn the lessons of philosophy, or if they fight, they take care of each other's wounded too.

All the changes which geology shews to have taken place on this globe are changes from a *lower* to a *higher*, from a simpler to a more complex organization.

Man, the last created of earth's inhabitants, surpasses all previously formed animals; and man, as the centuries roll by, rises higher and higher in the scale of life: he is constantly increasing in knowledge, and hence in power over the forces of nature; he is constantly gaining experience as to the results of various kinds of conduct, and hence is constantly gaining juster views of what conduct is best, most desirable to be cultivated.

Life, when intelligence is directed upon its operations must needs yield experience, ex-

perience is the most useful kind of knowledge, knowledge is the chief ingredient in wisdom, and wisdom tends to produce happiness; hence there is, in the constitution of the world, a provision which tends to bring about the ultimate happiness of the human race.

If an everlasting torturer directed the world's affairs would things be so ordered?

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## VIII.

*View of arguments on the popular side. — Existence of temporal pain not irreconcilable with the existence of a Perfect God. — Consensus of divines. — Sin against an Infinite Being. — Endless torment as a deterrent. — Forewarning no justification of excessive punishment. — On the wicked being tormented everlastingly in spite of God's will to the contrary. — On the necessity of a perfectly just and holy God tormenting sinners everlastingly. — On the pains of the condemned being spiritual. — On the evil of unsettling the minds of the weak.*

HAVING now shewn that the doctrine under consideration is in a high degree mischievous, that it is opposed to the teaching of God's Word and of God's works, and furthermore, that it is incapable of being proved by *any conceivable* revelation; I proceed to take a view of all the arguments I have ever met with on the popular side of the question, and to shew how easily they may all be demolished.

I commence with the strongest and in fact the only argument which deserves more than a few words of notice.

It is said by some upholders of the popular opinion, that the notion of *everlasting* suffering in a future world is strictly no more a difficulty,

is no more irreconcilable with the *perfect* goodness of God than is the existence of *temporal* suffering in this world: and that, as we assume, that the latter difficulty admits of some explanation, so we may believe that the former (essentially connected with, or dependant on, the latter as it may be) may likewise admit of a similar explanation.

Is the existence, however, of *temporal* pain irreconcilable with the perfect goodness of God? Is no explanation of the seeming difficulty *conceivable*?

Suppose that in consequence of the existence of pain, the aggregate amount of happiness ultimately attained by God's creatures, will be greater than what would otherwise have been attainable, and that it will be out of all proportion to the pain suffered. —

Suppose too that under this scheme no single creature will suffer greatly for any long time — suppose, in fact, that the evil is transient and that the good resulting from it will be permanent — that the pain will cease and that the consequent pleasure, which will result in part from the mere relief from that pain, will last for ever. What is there in such a scheme that it should not be approved of, by our conscience and reason, as worthy of a good and

perfect God? We do not consider it inconsistent with a father's goodness, that he should subject his son to rough discipline in youth, in order that he may be happier in after life, provided that the subsequent happiness, promises to be great compared with the previous discomfort. Nor do we consider it as inconsistent with the wise economy of a good husbandman that he should cast into the ground good seed — seed that might serve to nourish his family — if he has reason to expect, that what he casts away in the sowing time, he will get back with rich interest in the harvest.

That God's scheme with reference to man is in accordance with this hypothesis appears plainly enough from many passages of Scripture.

"For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Cor. iv. 17.

"He (chasteneth us) for our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Heb. xii. 10, 11.

"Let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire wanting nothing." James i. 4.

"Wicked doers shall be rooted out." Psalm xxxvii. 9.

"Yet a little while and the ungodly shall be clean gone." Psalm xxxvii. 10.

"As for the ungodly they shall perish and the enemies of the Lord shall consume as the fat of lambs, yea even as the smoke shall they *consume away*." Psalm xxxvii. 20.

"As for the transgressors they shall perish together, and the end of the ungodly is, they shall be *rooted out* at the last." Psalm xxxvii. 39.

"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest O Lord." Psalm xciv. 12.\*

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The consideration of the *course* and *character* of *human life* gives further credibility to the supposition we have made.

This has, in effect, been shewn in the last Chapter.

A few more words may be added.

Pains, it should be noticed, are often incident to a transition to a higher degree of culture, or

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\* See also 1 Cor. xv. 26, Heb. ii. 14, 1 Joh. ii. 17, Rev. xxi. 4 & 5.

Psalm i. 5, xxi. 9, xxx. 5, xxxvii. 2, 22, 29, civ. 35, cxix. 71, 75, cxxvi. 7.

Proverbs ii. 18, 22, iii. 12, viii. 35, 36, x. 25, xi. 7, 19, xii. 7, 19.

to a state of higher happiness. Laborious days bring mental improvement or increased material comforts.

We are cheated and learn hence not to judge hastily from appearances. We are pinched by poverty or provoked by emulation, and our inventive powers and energies are, as a consequence, stimulated into action. We are deserted by others, and we learn hence to be self-dependant.

We are sinned against, and we learn hence the real nature, and see the true colours of vices, of which, otherwise, we never should have gained so clear and just a conception.

The very remembrance of past pains affords present pleasure, provided that there is no fear suggested of their recurrence. Whatever therefore the happiness of human beings in heaven would otherwise have been, it must be still greater on this account, that they will enjoy the sense of relief from pain, and the delightful contrast to earthly life which the heavenly life will afford.

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If there could be found nothing in the world around us, nothing in the Scriptures, to favour the supposition we make with reference to the existence of evil or pain; still it would have to be admitted that the supposition afforded a

*conceivable* explanation of the difficulty; but with reference to the other difficulty, which has been compared with this, there, can be offered *no conceivable* explanation.

In support of the "orthodox" dogma, there has been advanced the plausible statement, that "for nearly eighteen centuries there has been almost a consensus of divines to the popular doctrine". This deserves a few words of notice.

In the first place, the fact cannot be proved; for although few men may have had the opportunity and the courage to raise their voice against the doctrine in question; yet the number of those who have, at heart, disbelieved it may have been very considerable.

In the second place, even if the statement were verified, either it would prove nothing, or it would prove too much. Two parallel instances will make this sufficiently clear. In our Lord's time there had been for many generations "almost a consensus of (Jewish) divines to the popular doctrine" of that time concerning the character and mission of the Messiah. Nevertheless *that* popular doctrine, as every Christian admits, was essentially wrong. There was too "almost a consensus of divines" for nearly sixteen centuries to the popular doctrine concerning witchcraft. That doctrine is now, however, happily quite exploded.

To the assertion so often put forward, that *an offence committed against an infinite Being must deserve infinite punishment* — I reply, that it must not be taken for granted that when the sixth word of a sentence is “infinite” the tenth word must also be “infinite” in order that the sentence may contain a true statement.

I would, moreover, ask the logicians who make the above assertion, whether it is contended, that an offence committed against a *very great* Being — a very great man, for instance, deserves a much severer punishment than an offence committed against a *very humble* man? Is it, for instance, far more heinous and deserving of punishment, to defraud a millionaire of a shilling than to cheat a poor famished wretch out of the same sum?\*

It has been said, that the future sufferings of the condemned may perhaps furnish to all the creatures in the Universe, the needful and effectual warning against rebellion. But, it should be observed, that there is no necessity that people should *really* suffer everlastingly for the benefit of others — if they only *seemed* to suffer the beholders would be quite as beneficially affected.

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\* See Chapter III., in which the true theory of punishment is discussed.

If, in order that the rest of God's creatures should be preserved in virtue and happiness, it required, that *one* person should *indeed* be tormented everlastingly, it would be gross injustice to sacrifice that *one* person for the good of the many. It would be *infinitely preferable* that not a single creature should be brought into existence.

If the agonizing shrieks of the damned are to form an inseparable accompaniment to the songs of the redeemed, it were better that a universal silence reigned.

To the assertion which is sometimes made — that although the punishment may seem severe, yet, inasmuch as the subjects of the punishment are duly *forewarned*, that that punishment will follow certain conduct, they cannot complain of injustice, if, of their *own free will*, they so act as to bring that punishment upon themselves — a short answer will be sufficient.

If earthly kings, following the injunction which bids them to be imitators of God, should act towards *their* subjects as the Heavenly King is thus represented as about to act towards His subjects; or if earthly fathers, following the same injunction, should act towards *their* children as the Heavenly Father is thus represented as about to act towards His children, we should certainly not consider that the fact of their having duly

*forewarned* their subjects or their children of the excessive punishment, with which their offences would be visited, as at all a sufficient vindication of the justice of the punishment.

It should be noticed, moreover, that very few people indeed can be said to be duly forewarned that certain conduct will be punished by everlasting torment. Many indeed *hear it stated* that the Almighty has threatened such a punishment; but what a small proportion of these believe that the threat has been uttered by God, and that it will certainly be carried out; and what a small proportion even of these *have this threat in mind* when, as we are told, they are rendering themselves liable to the punishment in question.

As a justification of God in awarding such a punishment as everlasting torment, it is sometimes said, "He is just and must, therefore, from His very nature punish sin and inflict everlasting pain on those who *go on sinning everlastingly*." To this one may reply — why did God knowing what this attribute of His would lead Him, under certain circumstances, to do, and knowing that, were men created, these circumstances would arise — why did He proceed to the creation of the first man?

If the Almighty, while the dust was yet lifeless in his hands, foreknew and foresaw all the con-

sequences that would result from the act of forming this dust into a human body and inspiring this body with the breath of life — if He saw, not only the fall of Adam, his expulsion from Paradise, the degeneracy of his descendants, the scenes of violence and wickedness which preceded the deluge — not only the sufferings of the Redeemer of the world, the martyrdom of many of the early Christians, the manifold and multitudinous miseries arising from war, pestilence, diseases of body and mind, from slavery and oppression, from poverty and crime; but if moreover He saw (what, according to the popular notion, He *did* see) the torments as of fire and brimstone continuing without end and without mitigation — why did He, when He might have cast the dust again to the earth, and left man uncreated, and spared His own beloved Son the untold agony of the Garden and the Cross, and spared His creatures an overwhelming weight of woes — why did He by His *free creative act* allow these frightful evils to be introduced into the world, when, *but* for His creative act, they would have had no existence?

It has been said, the term “Almighty” may be a hyperbolical expression and hence, God may not have the *power* to avert that everlasting

torment, which His goodness has forewarned us of, and which, especially by the act of Redemption, He has endeavoured in as many cases as possible to avert.

To this it may be answered — that Power, whatever it is, which is able, against God's will, to consign wicked men to everlasting torment and so to control the *acts* of God, may be able, for aught we can tell, to control his *words*. What dependance, then, can be placed upon a Divine revelation?

Moreover, how can we be satisfied that this same Power may not resist God's will to the *further* extent of casting the *good also* into everlasting torment?

It has been said, that the pains of the condemned will not be bodily but spiritual — that these pains will be the natural effect of their sins, and will arise from remorse of conscience.

Whether a pain is bodily or spiritual is, however, a question of the *least possible* importance; the only points in the matter worth considering, are the *degree* of pain and its *duration*.

It is not therefore worth while to enter upon the question, whether everlasting torment can or cannot be resolved into an everlasting gnawing of conscience.

The voice of Scripture and the voice of nature, both of which, as we have seen, so distinctly contradict the doctrine of everlasting torment, speak as decidedly against the notion of *mental* as of *bodily* torment — all that is proved against the one, holds with undiminished force against the other.

If indeed the soul of man had been proved immortal (which it has never been, see page 43) if it had been proved incapable of being rendered unconscious (a fact contrary to all experience) the hypothesis of an ever-gnawing conscience would then deserve what, under present circumstances, it does *not* deserve, our consideration.

There are probably some who may say: "Even if the evidence in favour of the commonly taught doctrine is insufficient, still it would be a dangerous experiment to make such an admission. The minds of the weak would thereby become unsettled. For a long time men would not know what to believe, and whilst in this unsettled state they would throw aside the ordinary restraints of morality."

That a certain degree of licence is wont to follow every great moral revolution, all must admit and deplore. It followed the teaching of the Protestant Reformers. Nevertheless most

Protestants maintain that the Reformation was, on the whole, a good work, and that if *one* generation suffered, many subsequent generations have derived from it vast and various intellectual, moral, and spiritual benefits.

We must often be content to endure a temporary evil, whilst we are advancing towards the attainment of a permanent and great good.

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## IX.

*Anteroom to the Everlasting Torture Chamber. — Man alone laughs. Why should man alone be tormented everlastingly? — Animals, their deserts and their punishments. — Creation and Preservation. — Reasoning with God. — Parents, whose children are enduring endless torment.*

If the popular theory — that some of us are to be tormented everlastingly — were true, what sublime mockery would there be in placing poor wretches first upon an earth, where are heard the merry shouts of careless children, the joyous songs of birds, where above our heads “with constant kindly smile the sleepless stars keep everlasting watch”, where beneath our feet the delicate beauty of flowers of every tint gladdens the eye.

What would have been thought of the propriety of placing a hundred bright and cheerful objects, suggestive of peace and happiness, in the anteroom to the torture-chamber of the Inquisition? Such a refinement of cruel mockery never entered the mind even of a Grand Inquisitor.

It deserves to be noticed that man the only animal that laughs has, of all animals, according to the popular theory, least cause to laugh.

But it is surely inconceivable that a being, so cruel and vindictive as to purpose to torment *some* of his creatures everlastingly, would inflict his vengeance only on *one species*. It is strange that the subtle reasoners of Rome have not arrived at the just conclusion, that birds, beasts, and fishes will have their share of everlasting burning. We may perhaps have this doctrine developed in due time in the Romish Church, and promulgated from the chair of the Infallible Pontiff.

In this world, the inferior animals, no less than mankind, are subjects of government, are rewarded or punished according as they regard or violate certain natural laws.

According to the popular notion, however, an animal cannot any how make itself deserve *everlasting* torment; and if its master, doing as he expects to be done by, puts the creature to any excessive or lengthened pain for its offences, society interferes, and the master learns by painful experience that he may not, in civilized countries, indulge his vindictive feelings with impunity.

What creature in the world, capable of feeling compassion at all, possesses so little of that quality, that he could see another creature, no matter what, in constant suffering, without ever feeling enough compassion to move him to relieve its misery!

Can then the Creator, the source of our virtues, be thought capable of conduct which, if practised by a human being, would cause that being to be *branded* as *inhuman* and as unfit for the society of his fellow-men?

Can it be thought that the Creator is utterly wanting in that quality, compassion, which especially distinguishes man from the inferior animals?

*According to the popular view* the Lord, Almighty and Most Merciful though he is

(1) allows children to be born who, He foreknows, will make such a use of their life and liberty as to bring upon themselves the doom of everlasting torment as of fire and brimstone.

(2) He allows children to survive baptism\*, at which time, had they died, their souls would have been saved\*\*, although in so many cases He foreknows that the prolonging of their life

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\* What shall be said of the consistency of those persons who, while they believe that had their life been taken immediately after baptism they would "undoubtedly have been saved", nevertheless thank God for their preservation — thank God i. e. for giving them, for a few years more, such comforts and pleasures as belong to earthly existence — for giving them these things when this extension of life has, as they believe, exposed them again to the risk of being condemned to everlasting torment!

\*\* See Book of Common Prayer.

here on earth will lead to their being everlastingly tormented as with fire and brimstone.

(3) He allows persons who are in a state of safety — persons who have repented of their sins, to survive and to fall again into sin, and to live and die in sin, and so to bring upon themselves the doom of everlasting torment as of fire and brimstone.

(4) He allows people to make themselves liable to the dread penalty, without representing to them in vivid colours the character of that doom, which will be theirs if they continue in their evil courses.

If the tortures appointed, *according to the popular notion*, for the condemned were portrayed in lightning characters in the sky — if the stench and smoke of the sulphur of the bottomless pit were always present to the senses — although life would lose thereby some of its little brightness, although the arts and the sciences might be less diligently cultivated, or might be altogether neglected; although the subject thus forced upon people's attention should quite engross their thoughts, making them careless about everything else but saving themselves from the endless torments; yet, how far preferable would this imagined condition of the world be, to its actual condition; the pleasures of this life surely are

not so dear to us, that it is good and desirable that we should enjoy *them* undisturbed, even if thereby we may be cut off from the enjoyment of all happiness in the future world and incur the penalty of everlasting torment. Some theologians indeed have professed to see an advantage in God's withholding from men such a vivid view and certain knowledge of the punishments of the future world as would exercise on their lives a very powerful influence. Such a certain knowledge, say these writers, would make every individual so intent on saving himself from future misery that he would entirely neglect his present interests; and thus there would be no possibility of human progress, no hope of a gradual advance in civilization such as is taking place under the present dispensation. These theologians\* who thus weigh finite against infinite advantages would, it is certain, take another and a juster view of the case after a few hundred years' experience of the pains as of fire and brimstone. They would come to think that it was comparatively a matter of *no importance* whether the arts and sciences flourished, or whether they fell into decay; whether men lived their three score and ten years in huts, or in

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\* See Paley's *Evidences of the Truth of Christianity*.

marble palaces; whether farmers employed spade labour, or used steam ploughs; whether men believed the sun went round the earth, or that the earth went round the sun; whether they lived under a blue, or under a flame-coloured sky; whether roses and violets retained their own sweet scent, or emitted a sulphurous odour; while they would feel that it was decidedly a matter of *great importance* whether a man did or did not suffer throughout all eternity pains as of fire and brimstone.

The Scriptures frequently represent God as inviting or allowing his creatures to reason and remonstrate with him. We may then suppose that He will grant his creatures a like liberty on the day of Judgment.

Imagine, now, a man born the slave of a cruel master — imagine such a man after a life of suffering, after numerous whippings and numberless days spent in dread of the whip, after a long and painful illness, bringing at length his earthly life to a close by an agonizing death — imagine him then awaking to consciousness on the Judgment Day, and hearing his sentence pronounced, hearing himself condemned —, no matter for what, for not having belonged to the true Church, or for want of faith, or for a wrong kind of faith, or for wishing ill to his

master in his last agonies and so dying in sin; — imagine him, on any account, condemned at last to suffer everlasting torment as of fire and brimstone.

Should such a one, when permitted to plead his cause venture to say. — “Would it not have been better to have left me uncreated, or to have taken my life immediately after baptism, or when, if ever, I was in a safe spiritual condition, than to have allowed me to live on in my wretchedness and to bring upon myself this awful doom?”

To such a question can any answer but one be conceived?

Imagine again a parent of blameless life dying a martyr's death. — What a reflection for his last hours, that some of the children, whom he is about to leave behind him, will (especially now they can no longer have his protecting care) stand in great danger of being condemned hereafter to suffer *during eternity*, pains as intense as those which he finds it difficult to endure for *an hour*.

*According to the popular doctrine*, loving parents will not have their own everlasting happiness spoiled by the consciousness, that their children are being tormented as with fire and brimstone. Some ingenious commentators have indeed conjectured, that parents in heaven will not *miss* the presence of those children of theirs,

whose lot is with the condemned. Do these ingenious commentators, however, think that it would be unreasonable for a parent in heaven to be troubled because *somebody else's* children are being tormented; or do they suppose that parents in heaven also fail to notice the absence of other people's children? Do they, in fact, suppose, that parents in heaven are under the impression that *all* people's children are present with them in their blissful state and that consequently the punishment of the wicked has no deterrent effect on the rest of mankind, or do they conceive the inhabitants of the celestial city as so intensely unfeeling and hardhearted, as to be capable of rejoicing, while some of their fellow-creatures are *to their knowledge*, writhing in pains which are never to have an end?

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## X.

### *Inconsistency of those who hold the popular doctrine.*

I will now briefly point out a few of the more glaring inconsistencies of those, who, in spite of the overpowering evidence on the side I advocate, still cling to the traditionary opinion.

It is surely strange that those Protestants, whose feelings are so strongly moved, and whose souls are so indignant, at the thought of the *torments* which were inflicted by *Roman Catholic persecutors* — persecutors who, in part at least, were actuated by merciful motives, by the desire to check the spread of opinions which, they regarded as heretical, and hence as tending to the utter ruin of men — it is strange that these same Protestants should be so little moved at the thought of those *everlasting* torments, which they expect will be inflicted hereafter by God — inflicted, not to lessen the aggregate amount of pain in the world, not to correct, not to deter; but from vindictive justice or vindictiveness.

They, who holding the popular doctrine have hitherto felt an assurance that their own salvation is secure must, as reasonable men, give up their


feeling of security. For on what do they rest their hopes? They have thought something, said something, felt something, done something (or it may be that they have realized they are able to do nothing, and that they conceive they have thus the only available merit of feeling and confessing that they have no merit) — on some grounds, no matter on what, they trust that they have the assurance of God's Word that their *own* salvation is virtually secure.

Let such persons however but consider, whose word it is they are trusting so implicitly. *According to their view* it is the word of a Being whose notions of justice and mercy are *utterly unlike* our notions of justice and mercy, and whose notions of truth and fidelity to promises may, therefore, be *as utterly unlike* our notions of truth and fidelity to promises.

A Being capable of deliberately punishing with everlasting torment *any one* of his creatures, whatever that creature has done or left undone, cannot be trusted by *any one* of his creatures, whatever that creature does or leaves undone. *All creatures are in peril of everlasting torment, if one creature is in that peril.* The word, the solemn promise of a Being capable of inflicting, under any circumstances, such a punishment is *entirely worthless.*

What can those parents have to say in their defence who while holding the popular view continue to bring children into the world? If there were only one chance in a thousand that a human being would suffer everlasting torment, then, to increase the number of human beings would be diabolic cruelty. Men and women who hold the popular doctrine, ought, in all consistency, to retire forthwith to monasteries and convents, or at least to devote themselves to a life of strict celibacy. If the popular doctrine were true, then marriage ought, in all ways, to be checked and discouraged. The gradual decrease of population ought to be regarded as the chief of all national blessings; and the end of the endeavours of all right-minded men ought to be, to ensure that, at the earliest possible date, the wretched human race should die off the earth.

How monstrously inconsistent is it for those who hold this doctrine of everlasting torment, to keep their opinion so much to themselves. If they think that sufficient proof exists of the truth of this doctrine — if they think even that there is *some* evidence which tends to prove the truth of the doctrine in question, why do they not give *all publicity* to this most important evidence? Why do not rich men, Catholics and Protestants, who hold this doctrine, and who



wish to do some great good to their fellow men, offer prizes, of such a value as will attract the very highest class of writers and thinkers, for the best works on the subject of hell — for the works which shall prove most clearly, and state most distinctly, what it is exactly a man must believe or do, in order to save himself from everlasting pain.

A dignitary of the Church lately described the attendance of non-communicants during the celebration of the Holy Communion as *one of the most important questions* which were being agitated in the Church.

One would think that *the all-important* question of this day and of all days, is the question — how men are to avoid this horrible doom. At present, poor bewildered men hear Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Independents, Wesleyans, Presbyterians, all telling them of this hell which is yawning for them; but all prescribing *different* ways of salvation from the dreadful punishment.


The holders of the popular doctrine, after they have exhausted their utmost ingenuity in collecting evidence in support of their view, and in ascertaining what it is precisely men are to believe and to do, in order to escape this everlasting torment, are bound, in all consistency, to be

importunate in *forcing* this evidence and this way of salvation upon people's attention. They certainly ought not, in such a case, to stand upon ceremony.

If we saw a fire burning down one house after another in a street, and if we beheld it approaching, in its destructive course, some building the inmates of which were, from any cause, insensible to their danger, we should not scruple to knock long and loudly at the door, and if necessary to break it in, and drag forth the inmates, even against their will. We should not refuse to interfere on the plea, that we had no business to intrude ourselves upon these strangers. On occasions of great danger, the rules by which we are content to regulate our conduct on ordinary occasions, are, or at least ought to be, cast to the winds.

We do not scruple to represent to those who on account of inexperience, weakness of character, or special circumstances, may be strongly tempted to break the laws of the land and to commit crime, or to break the moral law and to indulge in vice — we do not scruple to represent to such the possible ultimate consequences of giving way to temptation.

We consider it both proper and effectual to hold up as a warning to the youth who shews a



taste for convivial society, the degraded condition of the inveterate drunkard; or to hold up as a warning to the lad who betrays a propensity to be dishonest, the wretched condition of the convicted felon.

It must surely be as proper and as effectual to hold up as a warning to all who are in danger of falling into sin, or wandering into error, the possible ultimate consequence of their sin or error, especially when this consequence is held to be infinitely terrible — an everlasting continuance of excessive pain — pain as of fire and brimstone.

Why then do the believers in this dogma keep it so much in the background? Why do they observe such frequent silence with regard to it? Why do they not proclaim it at every street-corner? Why do they not rear in the midst of every city some imposing monument of their belief, that all may daily be reminded of the all-important truth?

It is utterly insufficient to say, in explanation, that terrors move less than love. There are indeed men, whom it is easier to draw into a certain course by persuasion and kindness, than by harshness and threats. But there are many who cannot be included in this class. The laws of every land appeal, and not in vain, to men's

fear of punishment. To say that they who know what the pain of burning is, would not be deterred from a prohibited course, by the fear of having to suffer everlasting burning — if, that is, the certainty or the probability of the threatened punishment were shewn to them — is to make an assertion contrary to all experience and analogy.

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## XI.

### *Concluding Remarks.*

A principal consequence of the abandonment of the doctrine in question as untenable and false will be, that the fallibility of the Pope, and of the Church of which he is the head will be made manifest.


The self-styled sole holders and dispensers of religious truth, it will be seen, have, for many centuries, been *virtually teaching* that the Almighty is not perfectly good but *infinitely cruel* — they have been attributing to God a degree of injustice altogether beyond human experience — they have been *altogether misrepresenting* man's destiny — they have altogether *misconceived* the end and *consummation of the Divine plan* — teaching, as they have done, the *everlasting duration of sin and suffering*.

These ecclesiastical authorities and religious guides, it will be seen, have, in spite of some differences in matters insignificant, agreed in believing and in teaching this conscience-bewildering, this heart-hardening, this spirit-crushing doctrine — this doctrine alike injurious to God's honour and to man's happiness.

Those other religious bodies too, which, while they have given up many *less pernicious* superstitions, have retained this dogma, the filthiest relic of Romanism, must expect their claim to guide mankind in matters spiritual will no longer be respected. Such a result is desirable. It is for the interest of truth, that men should cease to follow the guidance, or trust the conclusions of those, who, however conscientiously, have believed and taught, as God's truth, such a heathenish and diabolical doctrine as that of everlasting torment.

The Church of England, the only considerable religious body, which has not authoritatively taught the dogma, may hope, if she acts wisely at this critical juncture, to receive large accessions to her numbers from those other religious communities whose confidence in their old leaders will be destroyed.

It will be necessary, however, for those who are in authority in Church and State, to act boldly and promptly. The Thirty Nine Articles should at once be abolished, as out of date, and the National Church should then be reestablished on a broader basis. In the new Articles, the cardinal truth that the Supreme Being is good and just, in the *ordinary sense* of those words, ought to be distinctly stated, and the popular doctrine of



everlasting torment ought, as distinctly, to be condemned as a monstrous and mischievous error.

When men have thrown off this superstition, and their minds are relieved from the paralysing influence and oppressive weight of this dogma, they will be disposed calmly and freely to investigate the wide field of religious enquiry, and to examine the evidence offered by thoughtful men of every shade of opinion.

We need not, however, apprehend that anything that is good and true, in the religious systems of Papists or of Protestants, will suffer from the fact, that those religious systems will be exposed to the rigorous scrutiny of men, who are fearless of following step by step the guidance of conscience and reason, whithersoever in God's world they may lead them.

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## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER II,

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Roman Catholics and believers in Universal Restitution seem to me equally out in attributing such wonderfully salutary effects to the endurance of pain. What evidence have we for believing that pain will work so much more moral and spiritual good for men hereafter, than it does now? What evidence is there for believing that purgation of the soul can be best effected by subjecting the soul or the body which belongs to it to terrible pains?

Mr. Jukes in his work *The Second Death and the Restitution of all Things* writes: "Of the details of this resurrection and of the nature and state of the bodies of the judged very little is said in Scripture, but the peculiar awfulness of the little that is said shews that there must be something very fearful in it . . . , a judgment in comparison with which any present pain is light affliction."

There is surely every reason to believe that a series of vivid and judiciously selected dreams,

in which good children played a conspicuous part, would do more to melt hearts, that are to be melted at all, than æons of fire and darkness.

And how much more simple, how much more humane, would this process be than the Purgatorial process of the Roman Catholics and the Universal Restitutionists, from which one would expect a sufferer would merely be deterred from the commission of sin, and not be stimulated to the practice, and attracted to the love, of goodness.

Did any beings exist who could be brought to repentance and amendment of life only by being subjected to pains as of fire for long periods of time, might we not confidently reckon that He who is able to destroy both soul and body would mercifully relieve such beings from the burden of existence?

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